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ABSTRACT

Policy regarding the quality of external degree programs (i.e., off-campus study, often of a nontraditional nature) leading to graduate degrees is presented. Topics covered include: establishment in each state of more effective procedures for review of off-campus graduate programs; review and evaluation procedures of regional accrediting associations; and responsibilities of institutions establishing external graduate degree programs. (SPG)

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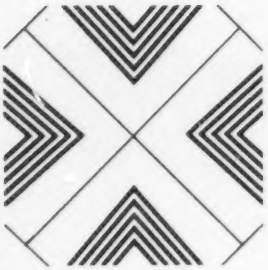
Non-Residential Graduate Degree Programs



A POLICY STATEMENT

The Council of Graduate Schools in the United States

HE 010 035

FOREWORD

In mid 1976 the Executive Committee of the Council of Graduate Schools appointed a special committee to consider the status of non-residential graduate degree programs. The Committee members are:

S.D. Shirley Spragg
University of Rochester, Chairman
Phyllis P. Bober
Bryn Mawr College
Wade Ellis
University of Michigan
Stirling L. Huntley
California Institute of Technology
Michael J. Pelczar, Jr.
University of Maryland

This statement, prepared by the Committee, is endorsed and published by the Executive Committee of the Council of Graduate Schools in the United States.

J. Boyd Page
President

Introduction

The Executive Committee of the Council of Graduate Schools (CGS) has noted with much interest as well as some concern the recent rapid increase in external degree programs, i.e., off-campus study—often of a non-traditional nature—leading to graduate degrees. A survey of its member institutions conducted by CGS in 1975 showed that at least 54 institutions were offering a total of 127 external graduate degree programs.

We believe strongly that the development of external degree programs is an important trend in American higher education. The healthy growth of such programs is encouraged and supported by CGS. However, questions have been raised with respect to certain aspects of these programs, including matters of territoriality, responsibility and jurisdiction, and motivation as well as questions regarding the quality of courses and programs.

The concerns and the responsibility of CGS must necessarily focus most directly on matters relating to quality, rather than on administrative considerations—unless these influence quality. Our primary concern is whether such programs offer to their publics graduate education and graduate degrees which meet the standards to be expected of graduate degree programs offered on the home campus under more traditional conditions by CGS member institutions.

In order to call attention to the principles which we believe are important for achieving, maintaining, and assessing the quality of off-campus graduate degree programs, the Executive Committee of CGS has adopted the following policy statement as desirable for external degree programs and commends them to state authorities, regional accrediting associations, educational institutions, and the interested public for their consideration, guidance, and implementation.

STATEMENT OF POLICY

The States

1. We support and encourage efforts, such as those of the Education Commission of the States, looking toward

establishment in each of the states of more effective procedures for establishment and periodic review of graduate programs offered by out-of-state as well as in-state institutions.

Regional Accrediting Associations

2. The regional accrediting associations, in their review and evaluation of educational institutions, should also review—and apply comparable standards to—graduate degree programs offered at off-campus locations as well as on-campus programs.

3. Regional accrediting associations should accept responsibility for the accrediting of all institutions and academic units offering graduate degree programs in their region, regardless of the location of the home campus of the institution and the accreditation status of the programs on that home campus. This will probably involve cooperative activities with the regional accrediting association having jurisdiction over the home campus of the institution.

4. Regional accrediting associations should move in the direction of more specific and selective accreditation, rather than accreditation of the institution "as a whole" as traditionally done. Thus, an institution might be accredited to offer on-campus master's programs, but not be accredited for off-campus master's programs except for certain specifically named programs at specified locations. Extension to other locations or to additional programs would require specific review and approval.

Institutions

5. An institution should not begin to offer an off-campus graduate degree program until it has received authorization from the appropriate state agency and from the regional accrediting association(s) involved. Its credits and degrees should not be recognized by CGS member institutions until this has been accomplished.

6. An institution proposing to offer graduate level courses of graduate degree programs away from its home campus has the responsibility to demonstrate successfully to the state and/or to the regional accrediting association(s) involved that (a) the purpose of instituting the pro-

gram is consonant with the expressed and accredited purposes of the institution and (b) there is a genuine and unmet need for this program at the proposed location.

7. Further, an institution proposing to offer such external programs of study has the responsibility to demonstrate successfully to the appropriate agencies that the programs are essentially equivalent in quality to comparable graduate programs offered on the home campus, especially with respect to:

a. the selection, oversight, evaluation, and compensation (both immediate and in terms of career opportunities) of faculty members in the program

b. procedures for the approval of courses and degree programs

c. the stature of the curriculum with respect to its organization, appropriateness, level, intellectual demands, and the intensity and duration of the effort required

d. the admission of students, their guidance and counselling, and the evaluation of their performance in courses and programs

e. the support offered by library, classroom, laboratory, and other resources

f. the detailed as well as general responsibility for the quality of the program accepted by the appropriate academic and administrative units of the home campus

g. the keeping of student records with respect to admissions, academic performance, etc.

8. Because of the heavy and sophisticated demands made by doctoral programs upon:

a. library resources (and, in all appropriate cases, laboratory or clinical resources),

b. the availability of a sufficient number of advanced scholar-faculty members in the academic unit to confer and decide on evaluations of student progress (in courses, qualifying examinations, research progress, and dissertation quality), and

c. the availability of advanced scholar-faculty members in related fields for advice and guidance and to serve on examining and dissertation committees,

an institution should not offer external doctoral degree programs unless there is full, easy, and frequent access to the faculty, library, and other resources of the appropriate

academic unit(s) on the home campus.

9. An institution should be able to demonstrate that a reasonable probability exists that credits earned in its off-campus graduate courses will be accepted for transfer credit by the home campuses of CGS member institutions which are accredited to offer comparable programs and which make a practice of accepting transfer credits.[1] If credits earned in such an off-campus course or program are not acceptable for credit in a comparable graduate degree program on the home campus, this would constitute *prima facie* evidence of the unacceptable quality of the off-campus course or program.

10. Credits earned in off-campus programs and entered in the records of the home campus should be identified by site where the work was done. Such credits transferred to other institutions should similarly be identified by source and by site.

11. All graduate degree programs of an institution, whether offered off campus or on the home campus, should be accountable to and monitored by the graduate organization of the home campus, i.e., the graduate council, and/or the graduate faculty, and the graduate administrative officers.

[1]Institutions vary significantly in their willingness to accept graduate transfer credit, ranging from none or highly restrictive to relatively liberal, depending on individual circumstances.